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Congress should mandate greater auto fuel efficiency

A bipartisan proposal in Congress would raise the mandated corporate average fuel economy rate for cars and trucks.

Given the price of gasoline, and the likelihood that it will remain high in the future, forcing automakers to become more fuel efficient is absolutely necessary.

U.S. Reps. Ed Markey, D-Mass., and Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., have introduced the measure, which would increase corporate average fuel economy, or CAFE, standards from 27.5 miles per gallon to 33 mpg over 10 years.

The auto industry has the capability to increase fuel efficiency, and should do so. Cars and trucks actually have become more efficient, but often the industry has used this efficiency to make larger vehicles, which American consumers sought.

But we can't afford to do as much of that any more. And some of those extra-large vehicles will probably have to go on a diet in order to use less gas.

Not long ago, General Motors announced that it would stop selling the largest civilian Hummer model. Smaller civilian versions of the military vehicle will still be available. That makes sense.

Would requiring the increase in average fuel economy hurt the auto industry?

Markey and Boehlert cite a 2002 National Academy of Sciences study that said technologies exist today that would allow cars and trucks to become more efficient.

Last year a representative from the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers told a congressional committee that more fuel efficiency could be achieved without compromising safety.

Those are both good reasons for passing the new CAFE standards.

Here's another reason: Boehlert has said, "The legislation will also strengthen our national security. Our unbridled consumption of gasoline has made us dangerously dependent on foreign — and sometimes hostile — governments to meet our nation's oil needs. This bill, more so than any provision in the recently enacted energy bill, will lessen that dependence."

Rep. Jim Leach, an Iowa Republican, called increasing fuel efficiency a "no-brainer."

He's right. It's time for a meaningful increase in fuel efficiency for American cars and trucks. This bill will help us achieve that.